

## **Amendment 2161 - Reduce DOD tuition assistance program and limit to use as a retention tool where the military services have a critical-needs shortage of military personnel.**

The Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Program gives active-duty service members the opportunity to take college course and be reimbursed for the tuition. However, this program duplicates the Montgomery GI Bill, administered through the Department of Veterans Affairs, which allows soldiers to utilize GI bill benefits while on active duty.<sup>1</sup>

Under current law, the Department of Defense Tuition Assistance program provides any active-duty service member a benefit equivalent to \$250 per credit hour up to \$4,500 per year.<sup>2</sup> Active-duty troops are allowed to take courses that are more expensive than this, but must pay the difference out-of-pocket or through student loans.<sup>3</sup>

Similar to the Defense Commissary Agency, the military's tuition assistance program is promoted to enhance recruiting, readiness, and retention for the military. But the DOD Tuition Assistance Program may not meet these three goals in a cost-effective manner.

In 2011 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report critical of the Department of Defense's oversight of the Tuition Assistance Program that found<sup>4</sup>:

- DOD's reviews of schools receiving the tuition assistance benefit are limited to only those that have a presence on the military installation where the service member is based. In Fiscal Year 09, that accounted for only 29 percent of courses paid for through Tuition Assistance benefits. The remaining 71 percent of the courses paid for through Tuition Assistance were distance learning and were not subject to these quality reviews.
- Only one of the services—the US Army—requires follow-up reporting indicating actions were taken in response to the quality review's findings. DOD is conducting no quality review in 2011. DOD plans to bid out a new contract in order for quality reviews to resume in 2012.
- The Department of Defense failed to perform oversight on online Tuition Assistance education programs, despite those programs receiving a large

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<sup>1</sup> —The Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty, Department of Veterans Affairs, [http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch30\\_pamphlet.pdf](http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch30_pamphlet.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> DOD Voluntary Education Office —Tuition Assistance payments, <http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=VOLED:SUB:0:::COHE,TITLE,IMG:257590,Programs,257789>, Accessed May 17, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Military Tuition Assistance benefits are paid out on a reimbursable basis, after a service member successfully completes his or her approved courses and must earn a "C" or better for undergraduate courses and a —BII or better for graduate classes

<sup>4</sup> GAO Report 11-300, —DOD Education Benefits: Increased Oversight of Tuition Assistance is Needed, March 2011, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-11-300>

majority of funding. Instead the Department of Defense focused on oversight of nearby college programs and programs on military bases, which are lower risk for fraud, waste, or abuse.

- The Department of Defense also failed to ensure that individual courses or programs at colleges and universities receiving taxpayer dollars were accredited. While the Department of Defense does coordinate some with the Department of Education, its failure to fully coordinate could lead to waste and abuse.

To date, none of the GAO recommendations for executive action to improve oversight of the tuition assistance program have been implemented.

The Department of Defense spent \$646,551 million on this program in 2011, the latest year for which figures are available. It is unclear if this program is necessary, given the GI bill benefits, and according to independent research there are better, more cost-effective ways to compensate our troops and retain and recruit a high-quality all volunteer force.

Additionally, our troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are least able to utilize this program's benefits as they generally cannot take courses while serving in combat units overseas.

This amendment reduces the spending of limited taxpayer dollars on this program that has little to do with national security and could save billions over 10 years.

What could this money pay for?

- Predeployment training exercises and flight hours for troops
- New strategic bombers for the Air Force
- Ohio-class replacement nuclear submarines for the Navy
- New tactical vehicles for the Army and Marine Corps
- Morale and family support services
- Renovations to family housing